



Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

As reported in last month's COSLA Connections COSLA has broadly welcomed the Executive's consultation paper on the proposed anti-social behaviour Bill. COSLA has made the point that Scottish councils are already developing a wide range of projects aimed at combating anti-social behaviour in their communities.

One of the tools at the disposal of the police and councils is the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). However, ASBOs are not yet commonly used partly because of the length of time taken to obtain them. Interim ASBOs, which were introduced by the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 to overcome this problem, came into effect on 27 June 2003. Effectively, they allow for a far quicker legal response to serious anti-social behaviour.

North Lanarkshire Council which has been at the forefront of using ASBOs has successfully applied for almost 40 ASBOs and has been quick off the mark in using the new tool. It secured three interim Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in the space of a week, making it one of the first councils to take advantage of the new legislation.

The council's first interim ASBO was granted against a tenant, followed by another two against owner-occupiers. Each interim order carries the same penalty as regular ASBOs - an unlimited fine and up to 5 years imprisonment on conviction for breach of the Order. One North Lanarkshire resident has already been jailed for five months for breaching an ASBO, highlighting how seriously the courts are dealing with anti-social behaviour.

The Executive has recently published two very useful reports detailing the ever

growing examples of good practice being developed by Scottish councils to tackle anti-social behaviour.

*Tackling Anti-social Behaviour: An Audit of Scottish Local Authority Practice 2001 - 2003** aims to provide an overview of how the problem of anti-social behaviour is being dealt with by Scottish Local Authorities. It is therefore primarily descriptive and does not attempt to benchmark or offer comparisons between practices. A major theme that emerges from this picture of current practice is that co-ordinated responses by all relevant agencies can significantly reduce incidences of anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisances and/or minimise their impact.

*Not Reinventing the Wheel... A Directory of Current Practice in Tackling Anti-social Behaviour by Scottish Local Authorities** describes projects under 18 headings including:

- procedures for tackling racially-motivated anti-social behaviour;
- support for complainants and witnesses;
- multi-agency partnerships;
- Good Neighbour Agreements/ Charters; and,
- Mediation services.

The Directory is aimed at practitioners whose day-to-day work involves combating anti-social behaviour. It will also be useful for those planning new projects and initiatives as it will enable them to see whether a similar idea has been tried elsewhere and, if so, what the advantages and pitfalls are likely to be. The Directory gives full contact details for people running projects.

This month's COSLA Connections' new regular feature - The Good Practice Page - features Renfrewshire Council's use of the Better Neighbourhood Services Fund to pilot four schemes employing a total of 16 Wardens to deter and reduce vandalism, tackle anti-social behaviour and provide a rapid response to litter and vandalism.

*Both reports are available from the Publications page of the Scottish Executive website: www.scotland.gov.uk



SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE

Last month's COSLA Connections outlined COSLA's scepticism about the Executive's plans for a Single Correctional Agency. COSLA would still welcome details of the evidence on which the Executive is basing its case that removing criminal justice social services from councils and creating a new national agency will cut re-offending.

In the absence of such evidence COSLA has commissioned a leading academic to carry out research into the international experience of operating different correctional systems. The results of this research should be available by the end of September and will help to inform COSLA's response to the consultation on the Executive's plans.

Next month's COSLA Connections will include details of the Scottish Executive's consultation paper on the Strategic Transport Authority along with COSLA's initial response to this potentially far reaching proposal.



COSLA

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On the Watters Front



Welcome to the third issue of COSLA connections I cannot believe that we are at issue three already. The feedback we are receiving so far is very positive and there will be a questionnaire in the next issue seeking views and thoughts.

Whilst publicly things have been a little quieter in the last few weeks there has been lots of activity behind the scenes as the new internal structure within COSLA beds in and we think about our next moves in relation to our stance on a range of issues including the single correctional agency, the strategic transport authority, PR and the "councillors as part-timers" claim. Still if we councillors are really all part-timers it means we have the time to read Connections from cover to cover, so you see every cloud has a silver lining!

As we head towards the end of the recess and what I suspect will be a hectic period for the rest of the year, the four Corporate Advisers within COSLA - Brenda Campbell, Bob Christie, Lynne Dickson and Barbara Lindsay - will be getting out and about meeting with council senior management teams. This is part of the overall strategy in ensuring that we as an organisation are doing the things that you want us to do in the way in which you want us to do them.

I hope that by the time you read this most of you will have had the benefit of a summer holiday or at least a break behind you.

Enjoy Connections.

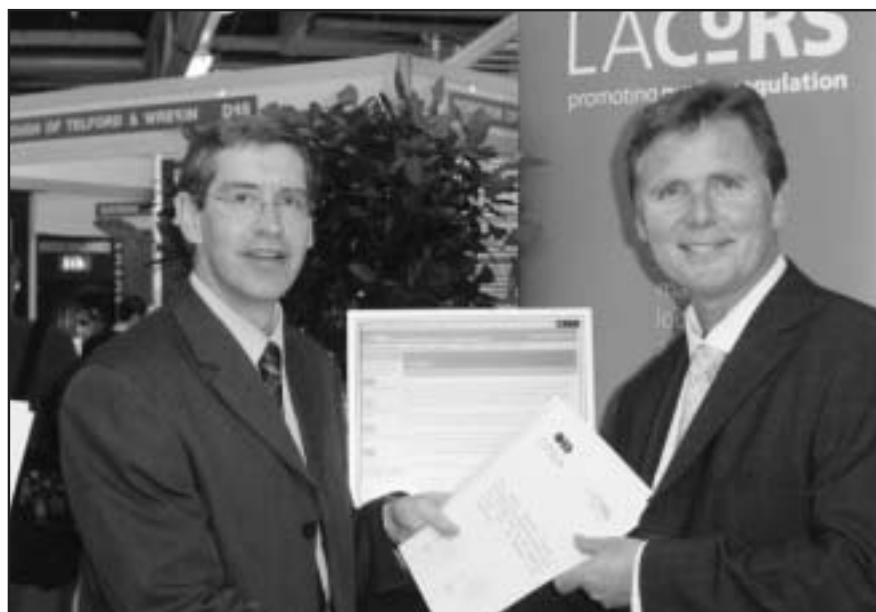
Councillor Pat Watters
COSLA President

COSLA Partners LACORS in Service Agreement

The Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and COSLA formalised a long standing working relationship earlier this month by putting pen to paper on a Service Agreement worked out over recent months.

The agreement forms part of COSLA's year long review and LACORS' desire to see relationships with all four local authority associations in the UK established on a clear and professional footing.

LACORS (formerly LACOTS) is responsible to the local authority associations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for assisting local authorities to improve the quality of trading standards, consumer advice, food safety enforcement and animal health and welfare by promoting coordination, consistency, dissemination of good practice and good regulation.



Success in these areas has resulted in the LGA and WLGA extending LACORS' remit to include Health and Safety at Work, Registration Services, Public Entertainment Licensing and Liquor Licensing. The agreement between COSLA and LACORS is sufficiently flexible to permit extension of the remit in Scotland, should local authorities so desire.

Welcoming the agreement, COSLA President Councillor Pat Watters said:

"Sustainable local authority regulatory services that make a full and effective contribution to improving the well-being of citizens and communities across the length and breadth of Scotland is a critical part of COSLA's agenda".

"LACORS (and LACOTS before it) has an excellent track record and pedigree developed from 25 years experience of assisting local authorities protect the public and particularly the vulnerable members of our society".

The agreement, which can be found on the LACORS website www.lacors.gov.uk has three main components:

- services to be provided by LACORS to local authorities within 2003/04 payments;
- examples of additional services, which may be provided by LACORS to local authorities on further payment; and,
- services provided by LACORS and COSLA including the role of the officer societies and COSLA support for LACORS delivery or service.

COSLA Chief Executive Rory Mair, (seen above left with Derek Allen, Executive Director of LACORS) said:

"COSLA welcomes this formalisation of a long standing and productive relationship with LACORS through the signing of this first Service Agreement"

"The agreement has been designed to provide more clarity and robustness in our working relationship with LACORS and on behalf of COSLA. I am happy to put my signature to it".

Tom Young, LACORS Lead Officer in Scotland will have overall responsibility for delivery of the agreement. Tom can be contacted at tomy@cosla.gov.uk.



COSLA in Brussels

Before Brussels closes down for its traditional summer break, COSLA held a reception in its recently re-staffed Brussels Office.

Representatives from a wide range of organisations such as the European Parliament, the Commission, Scottish Executive EU Office, Scotland Europa and other European local authority associations and networks attended the event and enjoyed the delights of haggis and other Scottish food. They were also able to meet with COSLA President Pat Watters, Chief Executive Rory Mair, Corporate Adviser Barbara Lindsay, Brussels Officer Silke Isbrand and the Chair of the South of Scotland Alliance David Parker.

President Pat Watters highlighted the importance of European work and outlined the joint work programme agreed between COSLA and the four European regional consortia. This focuses on regional policy, environment, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Future of Europe debate.



From left to right, José Palma Andrés, Bill Miller MEP and, Councillor Pat Watters.

He confirmed that COSLA will be an active and vocal player on European issues at home as much as in Europe. "Europe offers both an opportunity to pursue our political agenda at the heart of the decision making process, as well as firming up our position at the national level".

Bill Miller, MEP and Vice Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market, welcomed the recently increased cooperation with COSLA and stressed the relevance of legislation being considered by the European Parliament, much of which has direct and substantial impacts on the everyday work of local authorities.

José Palma Andrés, Director in DG Regio with responsibility for the UK, gave some valuable insight into recent European Commission thinking and confirmed its commitment to a substantial regional policy outwith Objective 1.

To extend COSLA's influence in Europe, the Brussels office provides vital services such as information and intelligence about potential policy and legislation of relevance to Scottish local government. It undertakes lobbying and advocacy on behalf of Scottish local government and develops positive alliances with European institutions and other local government associations. Also, it raises the overall profile of Scottish local government in Europe, as a trusted and professional partner.

Further information on COSLA's work in Europe is available from Silke Isbrand (silke@cosla.gov.uk).

COSLA's Spokespeople and Leadership Board

COSLA has appointed Spokespeople for 12 policy areas. In line with a formula based on the proportion of councils controlled by the political parties, six of the positions were taken by Labour and two each were allocated to the SNP, Lib Dem and non-aligned groups. The Conservative group on COSLA turned down the opportunity to take one of the positions.

Executive Groups, with representatives of each of COSLA's 31 member authorities, will be set up for each of the 12 policy areas in the autumn.

COSLA has also appointed a new Leadership Board which formalises the Sub-Group of Leaders meetings which has been operating for the last two years. The Leadership Board is made up of the three office-bearers, the Leaders of the five political groups on COSLA and a further four Leaders to give geographic balance. Spokespeople will be co-opted as full members as required.

The Convention has agreed to review the political structure and is to consider moving away from the more service specific Executive Groups to a smaller number based on themes. A review will be undertaken over the coming six months to recommend the exact groupings of services which could make up each theme in a new political structure

COSLA Spokespersons

Modern Governance	-----	Corrie McChord (Vice President)
Finance	-----	John Pentland (North Lanarkshire)
Personnel Resources	-----	to be appointed (Glasgow)
Education	-----	Ewan Aitken (Edinburgh)
Arts & Leisure	-----	to be appointed
Social Work & Health Improvement	-----	to be appointed
Environment, Sustainability & Community Safety	-----	to be appointed
Economic Development & Planning	-----	Willie Dunn (West Lothian)
Roads & Transportation	-----	Alison Magee (Highland)
Housing	-----	to be appointed
Rural Affairs	-----	Andrew Campbell (Vice President)
Urban Affairs	-----	Jim Harkins (Renfrewshire)

COSLA Leadership Board

President	-----	Pat Watters
Vice President	-----	Corrie McChord
Vice President	-----	Andrew Campbell
Leader - Labour Group	-----	Jim McCabe (North Lanarkshire)
Leader - Non-Aligned	-----	Alex Macdonald (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar)
Leader - Lib Dem Group	-----	Audrey Findlay (Aberdeenshire)
Leader - SNP Group	-----	Rob Murray (Angus)
Leader - Conservative Group	-----	Ian Hutchison (East Renfrewshire)
Member	-----	Charlie Gordon (Glasgow)
Member	-----	Jim Harkins (Renfrewshire)
Member	-----	Donald Anderson (Edinburgh)
Member	-----	John Morrison (East Dunbartonshire)

Substitutes

Labour	-----	Drew McIntyre (East Ayrshire)
Labour	-----	Anne McGovern (Fife)
Non-Aligned	-----	to be appointed
Lib Dem	-----	Kate Dean (Aberdeen)
SNP	-----	Bill Middleton (Angus)
Conservative	-----	Marcus Humphrey (Aberdeenshire)

HELPING COUNCILS TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

Delivering continuous improvement is now firmly established at the heart of Scottish local government as councils respond to rising expectations and make best use of limited resources. Councils also have a new duty to secure Best Value (Local Government in Scotland Act 2003), which is defined in terms of delivering continuous improvement in performance. There are very close ties between the new duty of Best Value and the new duty of Community Planning.

Audit Scotland is developing new arrangements to audit the way councils are responding to the new duties. The new 'Audit of Best Value' will cover arrangements to audit all of the new duties under the 2003 Act including Community Planning and Public Performance Reporting. The new audit system will shift the emphasis towards results/ outcomes and will have a major focus on improvement. Councils will be subject to a whole authority Best Value Audit every three or four years. Each council's audit will be accompanied by an Improvement Plan drawn up by the council and Audit Scotland addressing all the key issues or weaknesses that have been identified.

The new focus on performance management, service reviews, greater scrutiny both internally and externally, Best Value Audits and Improvement Plans means that both councillors and council officers are having to enhance old skills and develop new ones. They also need to learn from and make use of lessons from examples of good practice in other public service providers as well as other sectors.

The case for establishing an improvement service to assist local government in its quest for continuous improvement has been the subject of consultation over several years. The McIntosh Commission proposed an improvement service as far back as 1998 - around the time that the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) was established for England and Wales. Most recently, it was the subject of consultation as part of the Renewing Local Democracy Next Steps White Paper issued by the Scottish Executive in spring 2002.

The overall response to the Renewing Local Democracy consultation paper was in favour of establishing a local government improvement service. In view of the support the Scottish Executive, in its 'Building a Better Scotland' report on the outcome of the 2002 Spending Review made the following commitment:

"By December 2003, to establish with local government a new public service improvement function to help local authorities share best practice and increase joint working to deliver service improvements."

To reflect the need for a partnership approach to establishing the service a joint project team was set up with the Executive

COSLA and SOLACE to take forward the idea and bring forward detailed proposals. In addition, in response to the request for development funding for the new service made in the COSLA/SOLACE submission, the Executive has allocated a budget of £1.5m a year for three years to establish the new service.

The project team has consulted widely on various options for establishing an improvement service and is now at the stage of firming up proposals in order to achieve its remit of establishing a public service improvement service by the start of 2004.

In the Next Steps consultation paper the Executive committed itself to providing positive support to those in the front line of delivering public services - councillors and council officers. It recognised the important role played by organisations such as COSLA, SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) and APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) in providing advice, support and access to information about good practice and benchmarking. However, it also recognised the potential value and benefits of having a dedicated improvement service as long as this has credibility with councils and is able to provide a genuine resource and added value.

As a way of gaining credibility the Improvement service will need to engage at different levels within councils' structures. SOLACE is represented on the project Team and its involvement will continue. Elected members will be regularly updated through "Connections" but also through the Leaders meetings, which will ensure that a strategic level of involvement and engagement with the service is maintained.

In terms of specific issues and implementation there is also the need for the Improvement Service to connect with those officers in councils who are to be its main contact points. These would generally be Corporate Policy Officers and Human Resource professionals. There are existing networks in place however and general feeling indicates that the Improvement Service should look to working with these rather than duplicating them by setting up alternative structures.

Specifically, in COSLA there has been an Improvement Network operating for several years. The Improvement Service can use this network as a way of communicating with relevant officers in councils and progressing the service improvement objectives, for example through task groups. Similarly from the workforce development perspective, much of this work can be carried out with the Society of Personnel Directors (SPDS) and the COSLA Workforce Development Plan Task Group. These are some of the groupings that the Service can work with and there are others depending on the particular issue. It will be important for the service to start working with its 'constituency' and various stakeholders very early to make the most of the goodwill that exists at present.

A Scottish Local Authority Improvement Service

THE improvement service for local authorities is on its way, to support councils working towards continuous improvement. Many will have heard of it already and will know that it promises to help councils learn from each other at all levels and develop themselves to meet the demands of local service users. What it's about is support, flexibility and co-operation. It is about impacting on the front line as well as the bottom line. What it's not about is regulation, scrutiny and inspection. This is a period of sustained change and innovation in local government, so there has never been a greater need for such a service.

A Project Team of the three-way partnership between COSLA, SOLACE and the Scottish Executive has been consulting with Chief Executives and senior policy officers from all councils to find the answer to these questions. This has been followed up with consultation with staff at the coal face and through the corporate centres. The professional associations and other stakeholders such as APSE, the STUC, SCVO and the Scottish Consumer Council have also been consulted and this contact will remain. Through these meetings a clearer picture has been developing in relation to what the service might look like.

In relation to what it will do, the focus in the meetings with Chief Executives was on the four areas of activity set out in the COSLA/ SOLACE submission:

- knowledge and sharing good practice;
- self-help;
- building skills and organisational capacity; and,
- diagnostic support.

As a result the Project Team feels that:

- a) The service should be flexible, small and responsive to the needs and priorities identified by local government, and should find out what these needs are.
- b) It should be accountable to local government and engage proactively with all local authorities individually and collectively.
- c) It should probably be established as a company limited by guarantee, with a small core board with representation from COLA, SOLACE and the Executive. There is a possibility that membership could be extended to include a small number of other key bodies.
- d) There should be a reference group involving political leaders within COSLA and Ministers, which would meet once or twice a year. This group could include representation from the STUC and the Scottish Consumer Council.
- e) As well as being proactive in involving

local councils in its work, the service would also draw on expertise elsewhere - particular mention has been made of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in England, Syniad in Wales (the Welsh improvement service) and Audit Scotland. The service would also make links with and learn from improvement activity elsewhere in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

- f) The service would support councils by co-ordinating, facilitating and gathering and disseminating good practice, and when necessary could deliver services itself. The emphasis would be on connecting up activity that is already in place to meet the needs identified by local government, as well as identifying gaps and seeking ways to fill them.

- g) Finally, given the nature of the service, there is a need to find a name for it that reflects its role in supporting councils to achieve their goals for improvement, and we need your help. Suggestions are most welcome (sorry, no prizes!).

In the consultation meetings, participants were asked to comment on these and to identify priorities for the early work of the service. On the basis of these discussions, the Project Team has recommended the following early priorities.

- Developing an intelligent, coherent and user-friendly knowledge website that provides a central information point for good practice and is proactively promoted and developed by staff in the improvement service. This service would connect with existing websites containing good practice information.
- Working with councils to develop core competences for middle managers/team leaders, to develop training packages for front-line staff

in customer care, and to meet the needs of elected members.

- Focussing support on partnership working in key service areas such as Joint Future, integrated children's services, child protection etc.
- Supporting councils with their self-assessment and improvement plans arising from the new Best Value audit process.
- Supporting and extending existing networks within local government, such as the COSLA Improvement Network. Support should be focussed using the networks and structures already in place and being used by councils without wasting effort and resources reinventing new ones - particularly in relation to benchmarking which was raised as a priority during discussions with Councils.

Further detail of the setting up of the service will be developed by the Project Team. Other groups will be asked to work with the Team to pass on their expertise in the various areas within which the improvement service will operate. Without the commitment of senior officers and elected members in councils the service will not have the positive effect it deserves, so the Project Team will ensure the continued buy-in of key stakeholders at each stage.

The improvement service is welcomed by COSLA as one of the three partners. At the last meeting of the Convention (June 2003) a report on the proposed structure, remit and priorities of the service was unanimously supported by delegates from all COSLA member councils. COSLA President Pat Watters stressed the need for members' input to ensure the success of the service and the need for regular feedback at future COSLA meetings.

For further information about the proposed service contact: Richard Wheater, Policy Manager, COSLA Tel 0131 474 9277 email richard@cosla.gov.uk; Clodagh Memery, Scottish Executive Tel 0131 244 7023; or, Tom Aitchison, Chairman SOLACE, Tel 0131 469 3002 email tom.aitchison@edinburgh.gov.uk

Scottish School Wins UK Enterprise Award

A team of six pupils from an Isle of Harris secondary school has won the Young Enterprise UK Finals, an annual event designed to showcase the best enterprise projects from young people across the UK. This is the first time in some 40 years of the awards that a Scottish team has enjoyed this level of achievement, having seen off competition from over 45,000 students.

The pupils, from the Sir Edward Scott secondary school, formed a business - 'Beartas' - to develop and market a Harris Tweed tartan. Working with local weavers and manufacturers, Beartas has successfully sold a range of items including kilts, ties, scarves and cloths. They are hopeful that the business might be developed into a sustainable venture for the people of Harris.

Argyll & Bute Wins Recognition from Europe

The islands of Islay, Jura and Colonsay were brought to the stage of European technology recently, when the 3 Islands Partnership was given a special honourable mention by European Commissioner for IT, Erkki Likkannen for its entry to the e-Europe Awards. The project, which had previously scooped the Local Government Chronicle Award for Improving Services with eTechnology, was the only UK project to receive recognition at the awards ceremony.

Councillor Ian Gillies, Argyll and Bute Council spokesman for IT and Islands said: "This award is a huge boost for the professionalism and hard work of the 3 Islands Partnership. Many of the other projects (entered for the e-Europe Awards) were technology driven, but the important thing for the people of Islay, Jura and Colonsay was the customer focussed approach."

Argyll and Bute Council, the Local Enterprise Company (AIE) and Argyll and Clyde Health Board used Modernising Government Initiative funding to provide a solution to the challenges of distance and isolation.

A combination of internet access, video conferencing, a meeting room with scanners, digital cameras and camcorders available for public use, improve public access to Council services, health care or business support. The equipment is available in specialist service centres on the three islands, staffed by trained personnel. Rather than the long journey to make a planning application or to see a hospital consultant, local people can now access all of these things on their doorstep.

Fife Celebrates Web Success

FIFE Direct - the Kingdom's new community website - is celebrating more than 6 million hits on the site in its first 5 months.

Fife Direct, developed by Fife Council in partnership with Scottish Enterprise Fife, NHS Fife, CVS Fife and Fife Constabulary, has quickly grown in popularity and content since its launch in February.

The website is just one part of the Council's drive to modernise with £6.8m being invested across a range of initiatives to improve customer service. The website, designed around life events, gives 24-hour online access to a wealth of community information and local services as well as the opportunity to use a range of interactive services.

Feedback from organisations and individuals has been tremendous. More and more organisations are wanting to be a part of Fife Direct and the site's team of 250 editors and updaters across organisations is growing daily. Fife Direct is being developed to provide more services for individuals - for example, access to interactive advice or proactive updates on job vacancies. There will also be new services from booking library books and requesting or tracking a housing repair to finding an event and booking for concerts on-line.

Lanarkshire Information Sharing Partnership

North and South Lanarkshire Councils and NHS Lanarkshire have developed a new electronic system of storing and sharing information about patients' medical and care needs.

The joint approach to developing a system for sharing information between social work departments and health services, which is being funded by the Modernising Government Fund, is the first such initiative in Scotland. Information provided by patients is stored electronically in a secure computer system that can only be accessed by authorised staff. This allows professional staff to plan and deliver the care that people require without having to request the same information from the patient more than once. Before the system was introduced, consent forms and letters had to be exchanged to allow any information to be passed from one organisation to another.

The system is controlled by a strict protocol governing how the information can be used, setting out the procedures for obtaining permission from a patient, their rights to give or withhold any information, and the processes for ensuring the information is stored securely. Patients and users will have to give their consent to their information being shared between the organisations and they are being issued with a leaflet explaining how the information on their care needs will be used to improve the services they receive.

RENFREWSHIRE LEADS WAY IN TACKLING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Policies for dealing with anti-social behaviour have been much in evidence in the news of late capturing public attention and the national political agenda.

Renfrewshire Council Leader Jim Harkins tells Cosla Connections how his authority has pioneered an integrated approach to tackling anti-social behaviour.

"Along with other councils, Renfrewshire welcomed the recent Scottish Executive announcement that local authorities are set to be given more powers on this issue. There's no doubt that persistent disruptive behaviour affects the quality of life of far too many people and communities in Scotland.

I'm particularly encouraged that as well as offering more powers to deal with persistent offenders, the Executive is stressing the need for approaches which focus on prevention, mediation and changing behaviour.

Renfrewshire Council has been taking forward an integrated approach in our own services and with partner organisations - particularly through the community planning process.

Perhaps too often people are inclined to assume that anti-social behaviour can't be changed. In our approaches to education, housing, health, social work, community development and criminal justice, we are seeing in Renfrewshire some very positive results. We're working to build on those achievements in the years ahead."

One of the most notable successes of Renfrewshire Council's approach to tackling anti-social behaviour has been its neighbourhood wardens scheme. This was launched in 2002 as a £1.3million pilot scheme through the Scottish Executive's Better Neighbourhood Services Fund. So great has been the demand from other communities to also have wardens that the Council has invested £330,000 from its own budget to expand the scheme to a further two areas in addition to the original four communities. Further expansion is scheduled for the coming months.

In addition to providing a link to other council and public services, a main aim of the wardens scheme has been to enhance community safety. Indeed, their remit was defined only after extensive consultation with local community groups.

One of the benchmark targets for the wardens in tackling anti-social behaviour was that their work would have a positive effect in reducing the need for referrals to the Council's award-winning anti-social behaviour investigations team (ASI'ST). Recent indications are that there has been a reduction in the number of referrals in some areas served by the wardens.

The combination of deterrence and advice and support offered by the neighbourhood wardens is reflected in two services offered by the Council's Housing Department. In addition to the ASI'ST team, the mediation service offers an impartial, confidential and speedy process to help resolve neighbour disputes. However, if problems persist, then Renfrewshire has shown it is willing to take hard-hitting action to protect the interests of residents whose lives are being disrupted.

Only recently the Council was granted its fourth anti-social behaviour order and another six are being prepared. Established ten years ago, the ASI'ST team has gained a Charter Mark for its achievements and its structure and approach have been emulated by several other local authorities.

There is also a range of projects in Renfrewshire targeted particularly at young people. Operating across

a range of policy areas and organisations, these focus on providing opportunities which can lead to changes in behaviour or lifestyle. This approach includes support schemes to reduce exclusion from schools.

For example the new £300,000-funded Scottish Executive supported Reach Out project will support pupils who attend Johnstone High and Gleniffer High.

The project will aim to divert young people from crime and anti-social behaviour by focusing on links between educational disaffection, underachievement and delinquency.

Other partnership approaches include the Young Persons' Advisory Project, which is aimed at alcohol-related problems, the Renfrewshire Substance Diversion Scheme and the Renfrewshire Procurator Fiscal Diversion Scheme. There is also a broad-ranging Youth Strategy and a Litter, Vandalism and Graffiti Strategy.

Schemes to provide more sport and leisure opportunities have been introduced, partly to promote involvement in sport and partly to offer alternatives to getting caught up in behaviour which can lead on to persistent involvement in crime.

The Reparation and Mediation Parent Support Project has received over 100 referrals in a year of youngsters aged 10 to 16 who have been involved in early and minor offending. Offences can range from assault, carrying an offensive weapon or breach of the peace to shoplifting and vandalism. The young people referred are asked to complete a reparative task which can involve writing apology letters or attempting to make good their offences. Parents are also asked to consider their role and responsibility and can be asked to attend parenting classes to improve their skills.

"Overall, I think the work we're doing with a mix of approaches is helping to make Renfrewshire a centre of experience and innovation in tackling anti-social behaviour," concluded Councillor Harkins. "I'm not saying we've got all the answers but I believe we're asking the right questions and putting in place some very worthwhile and effective programmes."

Andy Denholm is the New Scottish Political Reporter at The Scotsman

Following David Scott's retirement Andy Denholm has been appointed the new Scottish Political Reporter at The Scotsman. Andy joined The Scotsman in November 1999 as a reporter in the Glasgow office. After a year covering general news and Glasgow City Council he was made Education Correspondent - the day before the SQA announced that there was a little local problem with their results that year. After 18 months in education he moved to Home Affairs at a time when the debate on justice, anti-social behaviour and what to do with Scotland's growing prison population began to take shape.

In April this year Andy was seconded to the politics desk to cover the Scottish Parliament election and took up the post of Scottish Political Reporter last month.

Andy told Connections he cut his teeth working as a news reporter for the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald. He also worked for the Press Association for two years in their Glasgow office before spending the first Scottish Parliament election following Jim Wallace on the campaign trail in Orkney.

COSLA looks forward to working with Andy in the years ahead and wishes him the best of luck in his new post.

LGA and WLGA to Review Working Relations

The Local Government Association and the Welsh Local Government Association have set up a joint review to look at future ways of working together. The review could lead to the WLGA becoming a fully independent body, along the lines of COSLA.

The decision to establish a specifically Welsh review was agreed by the UK Forum for Local Government (a meeting of leaders of the LGA, WLGA, COSLA and NILGA). The Forum was set up to examine the impact of political devolution on the UK's different local government bodies.

The UK Forum found that local government agendas in England and Wales have diverged over the past six years since the Local Government Association for England and Wales was formed in 1997.

Sir Harry Jones, leader of the WLGA and vice-chair of the LGA said:

'We now have different policy regimes on schools, health, local government finance and the improvement agenda in Wales. But Westminster and Whitehall still remain significant for us in some policy areas. A review should help us adjust our current arrangements so that Wales and England get maximum benefit from the devolution experience.'

The review team of LGA/ WLGA officers will be steered by a joint senior member/officer group of LGA and WLGA members with Sir Brian Briscoe, chief executive of the LGA and Sandy Blair, executive director of the WLGA. The review is due to be completed by the end of 2003.

Fast Track Social Work Recruitment

The Scottish Executive has announced that it is to help fund an additional 70 graduates to be fast tracked into social work posts. The graduates - who will need to have relevant degrees or experience - will complete the social work diploma within 15 to 18 months instead of the usual three years. COSLA has once again agreed to support the fast track scheme and will be helping to administer the recruitment process.

The 70 new places come on top of 50 places which were allocated earlier this year. Over 1,000 people had applied for these 50 places and the successful candidates were chosen after a thorough selection process overseen by COSLA. The scheme is part funded by the Scottish Executive and councils and is supported

by the Universities that provide social work diplomas.

The scheme is just one of several initiatives being driven forward under the Action Plan for Social Services Workforce, which aims to boost recruitment and retention of staff in social work services. These include a national recruitment and awareness campaign that generated over 70,000 requests for information about careers or vacancies, and the establishment of a new Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education, (launched in July 2003).

The scale of the problem being tackled by the Action Plan is shown by the latest social work staff figures which show that although the number of social workers increased by 144 between 2001 and 2002, the number of vacancies also rose by 93.

Pre-School Places Rise Six per cent

Statistics on children in pre-school education and daycare centres in Scotland in January 2003, published at the end of July, show that the number of children attending pre-school education is up 6% since January 2002 to 105,000.

In January 2003, 83% of three year olds and 99% of four year olds in Scotland attended pre-school education. This compares to 73% of three year olds and 94% of four year olds in January 2002. The largest increase in pre-school education was in private sector provision: a 22% increase in children attending private centres since 2002 compared to a 4% rise in council centres and 7% in voluntary centres.

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